



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk 860-441-6640  
Town Manager  
860-441-6630

**Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Karen F. Morton, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson**

**Tuesday, August 27, 2013**

**6:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **REGULAR MEETING**

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.*

#### **2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter  
Members Absent: Councilor Watson

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnayan.*

#### **3. Calendar and Communications**

**2013-0164**

##### **FYE 2014 Budget Follow-up**

##### **Discussed**

*Mayor Somers asked the Town Manager to request a meeting with the RTM in early October on a Monday night to discuss the upcoming budget.*

##### *- Fire District PILOT Payments*

*Chief Ken Richards and Carl Strand, President of the Old Mystic Fire District, were present to speak with the Council. Mayor Somers explained that the Council has invited the fire districts in to touch base, see how things are going, and share any thoughts or concerns about the district.*

*Mr. Strand stated unequivocally that things are going well with the district and department. There is an active board of 12 members that meets monthly on the second Thursday and meetings are open to the public. District audits have gone well with no particular issues and taxpayers are reasonably satisfied. There was a slight increase in the mill rate this year.*

*In response to Councilor Peruzzotti, Mr. Strand noted that the department is mostly volunteers (with 40 active volunteers) with 7 paid employees (5 firefighters and 2 administrative personnel). The board members rotate on a three year term with officers elected annually. The district does not provide trash pickup.*

*Councilor Streeter asked if the volunteers maintain the same level of training as the paid personnel and Mr. Strand stated yes. Chief Richards noted that Old Mystic has been a combination department since 1979. Volunteers and paid staff are held at the same level, which works well. All of the full time staff members have come from the volunteer field. Volunteers are subject to a six-month in-house orientation, EMT certification, Fire Fighter 1 certification, and must be Haz Mat operational. The training process takes from one and a half to two years for volunteers to be able to fully respond. The Council asked for a copy of the written criteria for volunteers used by the district.*

*Chief Richards was asked if the lack of a ladder truck in the Poquonnock Bridge Fire District has affected Old Mystic and he stated no, in the sense that Old Mystic's responses have not increased.*

Chief Richards was asked by Poquonnock Bridge to respond with the Old Mystic ladder truck on a regular basis, but he said no. The additional 650-700 responses per year would have an adverse impact on the department. However, the department is willing to respond for a true emergency.

Councilor Morton asked if the full time paid staff receive benefits and retirement and she requested a copy of the pay scale and benefits for paid personnel.

Councilor Johnson suggested that 40 volunteers is a lot. Chief Richards noted that his two stations cover 26 square miles. He reviewed the equipment located at each station. Old Mystic is always looking for new volunteers. There are more than 40 volunteers on the roads, but only 35 to 40 that are active. The problems with volunteer response times are addressed with paid personnel during the day. Volunteer teams rotate and stay at the station overnight. The district's average response time is just over 6 minutes, which is good for a mostly volunteer department.

Councilor Flax asked if the fire districts/chiefs would be willing to meet to talk about efficiencies. Chief Richards noted that the fire chiefs meet on a monthly basis and the departments train together. Chief Richards stated that he is always willing to meet and it is his desire to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Mr. Strand reiterated that the fire district's business is fire protection and emergency medical service, not trash pickup or other services.

In response to Councilor Schmidt, Chief Richards noted that the district's equipment is routinely checked by in-house staff and maintained by the Town of Groton. The Town's mechanic is Old Mystic's engineer so there is a good working relationship.

Mayor Somers asked if it is possible to set up a Town-wide volunteer training program so that volunteers could volunteer in any district. Chief Richards noted that there is nothing to prevent a member from joining another department, but they may be spread too thin. Old Mystic volunteers receive stipends based on response and attendance requirements. Department could train Town-wide. Old Mystic has a training facility on state property on Oral School Road that they have asked the state to turn over to the district in order to establish a regional fire school and training facility.

Mayor Somers asked about the ladder truck and the risk associated with not having one. Chief Richards noted that a ladder truck does not respond to all calls and described a normal ladder truck response.

Mr. Strand explained that the district creates a yearly budget for salaries, operational costs, and administrative costs and the mill rate is based on the amount of taxes to be collected. The mill rate has been fairly consistent over the last 12 years. The district also bonded \$2.5 million for the stations.

Councilor Johnson asked about the district's medical calls. Chief Richards explained that Old Mystic runs an R-1 (first responder) service and most of the district is covered by Mystic River Ambulance. The fire department responds to any life threatening calls.

The district's current year budget is \$1,948,000. In closing, Chief Richards noted that their door is always open and Councilors are welcome to attend district meetings.

#### **4. Approval of Minutes**

##### **2013-0215 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)**

##### **RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meeting of August 13, 2013 are hereby accepted and approved.

A motion was made by Councilor Schmidt, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, to adopt.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Votes:** In Favor: 6 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Johnson, Councilor Morton, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter  
Abstain: 2 - Councilor Antipas and Councilor Flax

5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

*None.*

6. **NEW BUSINESS**

**2013-0214 Purchasing Manual Update**

**Discussed**

*Town Manager Oefinger noted that the maximum amount that can be spent by the Town without a bid is \$7,500; however, the state is increasing the statutory amount from \$7,500 to \$25,000 effective October 1st. The Town is recommending that the Town limit in the Purchasing Manual be increased \$15,000.*

*John Piacenza, Purchasing Agent, provided background on the Town's Purchasing Manual and threshold for bids. He conducted a survey of bids for the last five years and 44.4% were under \$15,000. Mr. Piacenza also provided information on bid thresholds for a selection of municipalities.*

*Councilor Johnson asked how much the bid process costs. He suggested that by not bidding, the Town will pay more for projects. Mr. Piacenza noted that the cost of preparing bid specs is unknown.*

*Town Manager Oefinger noted that if the Council authorizes an increase, it will not be effective until October 1st because the Town charter references state statutes rather than an adopted ordinance.*

*Councilor Flax asked if consultant services are bid. Mr. Piacenza explained that the Town typically issues a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) for consulting services.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Peruzzotti, seconded by Councilor Antipas, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2013-0011 Revised Position Descriptions (2013 Standing Referral)**

**Discussed**

*Doug Ackerman, Assistant Town Manager, explained that the CILU contract negotiations included a discussion about the GIS Analyst position. It was agreed that the pay level would be increased based on an evaluation of the duties. A proposed new job description and title reflect those changes, which would be retroactive to July 1, 2013.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Flax, seconded by Councilor Johnson, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

*Mayor Somers asked about negotiations for retirement benefits and suggested that the Council would like to be included. Mr. Ackerman will be meeting with the Town's actuary soon to strategize and he suggested that a meeting be held with the actuary.*

**2013-0217 Referendum Date, Form of the Question, and Explanatory Text for the Police Station Improvements Bond Ordinance**

**A motion was made by Councilor Morton, seconded by Mayor Somers, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

*Councilor Flax asked if the Council could review the explanatory text before it is sent out. Mayor Somers noted that an incorrect explanatory text was mailed out to some voters last time and she asked for corrective action out of the Town Clerk's Office. The Town Manager noted that there are a number of entities who will be reviewing the documents and he can provide a copy of what the bond attorney approves before it goes out.*

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2013-0219      Referendum Date, Form of the Question, and Explanatory Text for the Flanders Road Utilities Expansion Bond Ordinance**

**A motion was made by Councilor Morton, seconded by Mayor Somers, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2012-0178      Economic Development Commission - Potential Work Program Items  
Discussed**

*Rick Norris, Kristin Clarke, Leann Obrey, and Bob Frink were present to discuss draft changes to the Town's economic incentive policy. There is an ongoing effort at the staff level to determine what other communities are doing, but staff has done a comprehensive review of the Town's policy. Ms. Clarke explained that the existing policy and process need to be streamlined, which is recommended in the Strategic Economic Development Plan. She provided background on research and discussions and the process going forward. Mr. Frink reviewed targets identified by the Economic Development Commission (EDC). Mr. Norris noted the desire to create one policy that would cover the various types of businesses in Town. The policy is based on the needs identified by the EDC.*

*Councilor Peruzzotti suggested that the policy involves filtering through the Town Manager to determine viability rather than the Town Council. Mr. Norris stated that the Commission wants the Town Manager to be able to approve use of the incentives. The Town Council would approve the types of incentives and the Town Manager would enact them. Councilor Johnson explained that the proposed policy will more clearly identify what incentives businesses are eligible for.*

*Mayor Somers has a number of questions and she would like time to review the document in more detail. She expressed concern with staff control over the Economic Development Commission. Ms. Clarke noted that when the specific incentive programs are examined, changes may be made to the policy. Staff will work with the EDC to come up with the programs.*

*Mr. Frink reiterated that the policy is a more streamlined way of doing business and there are many incentive programs that need to be vetted as part of the next phase. Ms. Obrey feels that the policy provides guidelines that provide businesses with the confidence necessary to move forward. She asked the Council to forward questions to the EDC so that any apprehensions can be addressed.*

*The consensus of the Council was to table further discussion of this item and to provide questions to the EDC by next Wednesday, September 4th, so they can be discussed at the regular meeting on Thursday.*

**2013-0089      Plan to Reduce the Number of Voting Districts  
Discussed**

*The Council received a presentation by the Registrars of Voters on the costs associated with reducing the number of voting districts. Councilor Peruzzotti still feels the presentation was inadequate. She stated that she does not agree with the numbers and she does not have enough information to make a decision at this point. Councilor Peruzzotti asked that this item be tabled and left on the referral list to allow her time to do more research.*

**2013-0216      Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) Program**

**Discussed**

Program Manager Rick Norris, Economic Development Specialist Kristin Clarke, and Genevieve Sherman from the Clean Energy Finance and Investment Authority (CEFIA) were present to discuss C-PACE, an energy incentive and economic development program. Ms. Sherman explained who CEFIA is and how they use a pool of rate payer funds for energy incentive programs. They leverage money in the fund across many sectors. C-PACE is a financing structure that allows commercial properties to apply for funding from CEFIA for qualifying energy projects. Businesses are linked with upfront financing that is repaid as a benefit assessment on the property through property tax bills. Sixty towns in Connecticut are participating. The assessment is billed in a manner chosen by the town, which collects and remits the funds to CEFIA. Approved projects must meet a savings to investment ratio greater than 1 over the term of the project and mortgage holders must consent. A C-PACE loan is senior to a mortgage but subordinate to taxes.

In Connecticut, towns must opt in to participate in PACE. First, the legislative body passes a resolution authorizing staff to sign an agreement for the Town to act as the loan servicer. CEFIA reimburses the Town for added administrative costs. The program remains in effect until the Town opts out. Mr. Norris explained that the Town is not responsible for payers in arrears; liens are assigned to CEFIA. He stated that the program is viewed as an economic development incentive that can be offered to businesses when they expand. Ms. Sherman reviewed some projects undertaken to date.

In response to Councilor Peruzzotti, Ms. Sherman noted that CEFIA provides general press material and provides grants for marketing to some towns. Ms. Clarke noted that the Eastern Connecticut Chamber of Commerce is marketing the program on behalf of New London and Waterford.

The length of the process varies based on the project, contractor negotiation, and lender approval. CEFIA has trained contractors on the program. Communities that have been wary about opting in are concerned about the superiority of the loan to other special assessments and the future viability of the agency. There are currently two businesses in Groton that want to take advantage of the program.

Ms. Sherman noted that CEFIA's revenue sources are the ratepayer pool, a regional greenhouse gas emissions program, and a couple of other sources.

**A motion was made by Councilor Johnson, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

The interest rate depends on the project and ranges from 4.5% to 6% for 13 to 20 years. Councilor Antipas asked if the proposed payment of \$500 will cover the increase in administrative fees for the Town. Mr. Norris noted that any additional justifiable costs will be reimbursed by CEFIA including necessary software upgrades.

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2012-0246**

**Pending Claim**

**Not Discussed**

**2013-0221**

**Poquonnock Bridge Fire District/Attorney-Client Privileged Discussion**

A motion was made by Councilor Streeter, seconded by Councilor Peruzzotti, that the Town Council, along with Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Town Attorney Eric Callahan, go into executive session at 8:46 p.m. pursuant to General Statutes 1-200 (6) (E) and 1-210 (b) (10) to discuss an attorney-client privileged document and legal advice related to same concerning the current and/or potential future status of the Poquonnock Bridge Fire District.

**The motion carried unanimously**

**Discussed**

*The executive session concluded at 9:09 p.m.*

**7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List**

*None.*

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

*None.*

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

*The meeting adjourned at 9:10 p.m.*